

Five Star Call Centers



Five Star Call Centers began employing people with disabilities in 1986. They realized that call center positions were oftentimes a perfect fit for people with disabilities. Also, they have had hundreds of team members with a variety of disabilities who have obtained and maintained great careers at Five Star because mobility, strength, and physical stamina are not required for their positions.

Currently, Five Star Call Centers has 300 employees in Sioux Falls and 550 nationwide. There are approximately 25 employees with disabilities in Sioux Falls and 45 nationwide. There are team members with Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, and epilepsy who encounter limited mobility and utilize wheelchairs, walkers, and canes. They also have team members with limited strength endurance and visual impairments. Employees with disabilities work in order entry, customer service, technical support, and sales positions. Five Star Call Centers has provided workplace accommodations such as flexible work schedules, frequent breaks, customized training, special equipment including ergonomic work stations, larger monitors, and special computer software for employees with visual impairments. The Sioux Falls facility is all on one level with large entry and private restrooms.

Joel Sylvester, chief marketing officer, states, "We find team members with disabilities have amazing personalities, spirit, and passion who love to do their job every day and help customers over the phone. Problem-solving is a part of their everyday life and translates into being a great team member." Five Star has worked with state agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired as well as the Sioux Falls Community Campus to recruit and hire employees.

Five Star Call Centers HR generalist, Danielle Sickinger, is responsible for pre-screening all applicants. Specific hiring decisions are made by custom success managers whose roles range from general customer service, to technical support, medical, and financial services so team members can be placed in the best position to succeed based on their skills and experience.

Employee SUCCESS: **Tonie Lee**



Facing issues of poverty, drugs, and homelessness, Tonie Lee grew up in less than ideal circumstances. At one point she hit “rock bottom” and felt she had no way out. Then she had a reason for change. Having a daughter provided Tonie with the motivation to “break the cycle” to give her the best life possible. It was not going to be an easy road, but Tonie was ready.

Tonie connected with SD Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and began to explore possibilities. She was determined to end her reliance on disability, food stamps, and other programs.

Tonie worked with her VR counselor, Adam Anderson, to determine a vocational direction and enrolled as a full-time student at Southeast Technical Institute during the fall of 2015. Something she NEVER thought was possible. Tonie pushed herself and graduated with AA degrees in Administrative Assistant and Business Administration: Human Resources emphasis programs in August 2017, with HONORS!

Her next step was to find the right employment opportunity. This was a little intimidating for Tonie as she had limited work experience. Through DRS, Tonie connected with an employment consultant, Katie Medema, to receive assistance with resume writing, mock interviews, and finding job leads. Through this assistance, Tonie was hired as a customer service representative at Five Star Call Centers...a position she was not sure she would like or that she could even do.

Both of Tonie’s concerns were quickly alleviated. She has thrived in her position at Five Star Call Centers. Besides loving her job of talking to and helping customers every day, she is so thankful for the amazing work environment at Five Star Call Centers. She stated, “I have the most supportive co-workers and managers in the world!” When meeting with her managers, Tonie stated, “They coach me in a positive, respectful manner, telling what I am doing right and offering ways to improve, so that I can do my best.” Tonie added that she has never worked in a place where she felt so at home. She said, “I can be me and respected for who I am without judgement. At Five Star, co-workers support and push each other to improve, while having fun doing it! We have games and competitions to win pizza parties and prizes to make it enjoyable while improving our call handle times.”

Tonie was given a tremendous honor in January 2019. She was nominated for and WON the Rookie of the Month award! It is quite a distinction, as Five Star only has one Rookie each month. This is what Lisa Margeson had to say about Tonie: “I would like to nominate Tonie Lee for Employee of the Month for the month of January 2019. Since being hired, Tonie has maintained PERFECT attendance! Toward the end of

December, Tonie was trained and brought onto a dedicated team. Since being trained, not only has Tonie maintained her perfect attendance, but has done an AMAZING job in her daily performance! Each week, she continues to improve in all metrics, from her time spent in After Call Work, Talk Time, and her overall Average Handle Time. Tonie started the month at just over 5 minutes in Average Handle Time. Each week, she decreases between 15 to 30 seconds, which is awesome to see. Tonie is very effective in the way she handles each call and is currently one of the top performers on the team with an Average Handling Time for the month so far at 3 minutes 41 seconds! I'm ecstatic to see what she will do in the future. Thank you Tonie for your constant dedication and bubblyness that you bring to the team! Congratulations on the Rookie of the Month win Tonie!"

Beyond this award, Tonie is incredibly satisfied with her new sense of independence. She feels that she is making a difference by contributing to society, to Five Star and their customers, and most importantly to her family! She cannot believe how her life has changed for the better.

Employee SUCCESS: Tom Olson



When Tom Olson is asked about what the best part of working for Five Star Call Centers, he's quick to reply, "Free coffee in the breakroom, of course! But most of all, I love working at Five Star because of the people...the comradery with my co-workers is special. It's a great place to work!"

Getting to the place where he can enjoy coffee at work with co-workers was a hard-fought journey for Tom. As a young child, he was diagnosed with a brain tumor that had to be removed, causing damage to part of his brain where vision is processed, resulting in becoming legally blind and having fine motor issues.

From the beginning, Tom had a very supportive family and full team backing him. He was referred to SD Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired in 2014, at 16 years of age. Acquiring early exposure to work and skills of blindness were key to Tom accomplishing his goals.

Tom participated in classes at the SD Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, where he was exposed to assistive technology such as ZoomText and other software programs to assist him in school. He also learned how to cook, clean, and do laundry. In orientation and mobility, he learned to navigate steps, curbs, and ways to travel safely in a variety of environments. He also participated in classes called "World of Work."

Additionally, his team at Lincoln High School and the Sioux Falls Community Campus, supported Tom in participating in Project Skills. Through this paid career exploration program, he worked at Sanford Wellness Center doing cleaning for 250 hours.

In the fall of 2018, his employment specialist through the Sioux Falls School District, Keith Thompson, was assisting Tom to find a second Project Skills work experience. Keith contacted Five Star Call Centers and lined up an interview for Project Skills with HR. Instead of getting the Project Skills placement, Tom was offered a competitive job for the holiday season! Before starting, Keith met with Five Star customer success manager, TJ Law, to arrange for any necessary accommodations to allow Tom to do his job efficiently. Fortunately, Five Star's computer software system was already accessible to meet Tom's needs. They added a few "bump dots" to his phone and he was ready to learn his new job.

What started for Tom as a seasonal job, turned into a full-time job with benefits! Once he had his "foot in the door," Tom's "can do" work attitude and perfect attendance helped in getting the offer from Five Star. Now, he feels he is truly living his life to the fullest!

Besides enjoying his full-time job at Five Star, Tom has more than enough hobbies to keep him busy. Tom stated, "I'm an insufferable Minnesota Vikings and Twins fan." Family and friends also got Tom interested in following the Minnesota Golden Gophers and South Dakota State University Jackrabbits in both football and basketball. While in high school, Tom was the student manager for the Lincoln Patriot football team and an Eagle Scout. He also enjoys swimming, tubing, water skiing, and wakeboarding. He recently learned the art of wake surfing. Tom's first and greatest passion is music. He attends concerts and listens to many genres including rock, pop, rap, and recently adding country to his play list.

Tom agrees that he would not be where he is today without the amazing support from his family, friends, teachers at Lincoln High School, Community Campus, staff at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind, VR counselor, and Five Star Call Centers managers and co-workers. Great job TOM and TEAM!